ISSN 0712-7774

CEREBUS

RICK'S STORY

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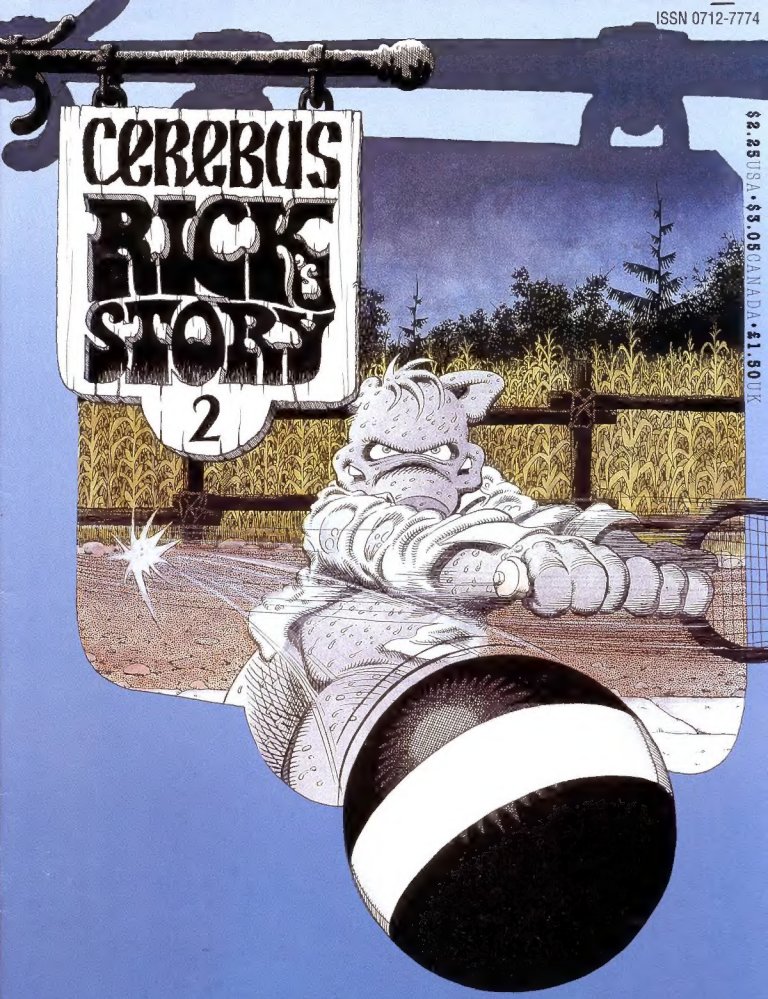

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AUG

E X C E R P T

Gentlemen of the jury — for *you* deserve to be so called — I have had a remarkable experience. In the past the prophetic voice to which I have become accustomed has always been my constant companion, opposing me even in quite trivial things if I was going to take the wrong course. Now something has happened to me, as you can see, which might be thought and is commonly considered to be a supreme calamity; yet neither when I left home this morning, nor when I was taking my place here in the court, nor at any point in any part of my speech did the divine sign oppose me. In other discussions it has often checked me in the middle of a sentence; but this time it has never opposed me in any part of this business in anything that I have said or done. What do I suppose to be the explanation? I will tell you. I suspect that this thing that has happened to me is a blessing, and we are quite mistaken in supposing death to be an evil. I have good grounds for thinking this, because my accustomed sign could not have failed to oppose me if what I was doing had not been sure to bring some good result.

We should reflect that there is much reason to hope for a good result on other grounds as well. Death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation, and the dead have no consciousness of anything; or, as we are told, it is really a change: a migration of the soul from this place to another. Now if there is no consciousness but only a dreamless sleep, death must be a marvellous gain. I suppose that if anyone were told to pick out the night on which he slept so soundly as not even to dream, and then to compare it with all the other nights and days of his life, and then were told to say, after due consideration, how many better and happier days and nights than this he had spent in the course of his life — well, I think that the Great King himself, to say nothing of any private person, would find these days and nights easy to count in comparison with the rest. If death is like this, then, I call it gain; because the whole of time, if you look at it in this way, can be regarded as no more than one single night. If on the other hand death is a removal from here to some other place, and if what we are told is true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing could there be than this, gentlemen? If on arrival in the other world, beyond the reach of our so-called justice, one will find there the true judges who are said to preside in those courts, Minos and Rhadamanthys and Aeacus and Triptolemus and all those other half-divinities who were upright in their earthly life, would that be an unrewarding journey? Put it in this way: how much would one of you give to meet Orpheus and Muasaeus, Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die ten times over if this account is true. It would be a specially interesting experience for me to join them there, to meet Palamedes and Ajax the son of Telamon and any other heroes of the old days who met their death through an unfair trial, and to compare my fortunes with theirs — it would be rather amusing, I think -; and above all I should like to spend my time there, as here, in

...continued on last page

CEREBUS
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RICK'S STORY
•
(Cerebus 220 to Cerebus 231)

MONTHLY
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HAH!
"BARTENDER-POPE" HE SAYS.
BUT--THAT'S WHAT CEREBUS HIMSELF SAYS HE
CEREBUS OUGHT TO CONDEMN HIM TO--TO *
"TO..."?
NOTHING. SHUT. UP.
JUST SKIP IT...OKAY? CEREBUS IS
TH' TRUTH HURTZ, ANH?
SHUT! UP!
UH...
WHAT'S CEREBUS STANDING AROUND OUT HERE FOR?
SHUT! UP! CEREBUS WAS JUST ENJOYING THE BEAUTIFUL MORNING AND NOW YOU SPOILED IT!
(* BEAUTIFUL MORNING?? WHAT IS CEREBUS TALKING ?
SHUT! UP!
KLIK-KLAK

GOOD MORNING!
I... uh...
I CLEANED UP THE BROKEN GLASS AND THE SPILLED-- uh-- SPILLED?!
OHHHH BOY.
HEH-HEH THAT BAD WAS I?
AW, GEE.
LISTEN..
I SWEAR TO YOU I DO NOT REMEMBER ANYTHING I SAID OR DID LAST NIGHT
AFTER MY LITTLE "FIRST DRINKING"-- DEMONSTRATION, THAT'S
IT'S LIKE... JAKA'S PAUNU FACE... IT'S WHAT I DO WHEN I'M NERVOUS (Y'KNOW?)...
...WHEN I'M SETTLING IN SOMEPLACE NEW. ONCE I'M SETTLED IN I'M USUALLY FINE.
REALLY

YOU SEEM TO THINK BECAUSE YOU DON'T REMEMBER DOIN' IT, THAT THAT MEANS YOU DIDN'T DO NOTHIN' WRONG
O OF COURSE, NOT REMEMBERING IN NO WAY EXCUSES WHAT I DID WRONG - IF I SAID OR DID ANYTHING TO MAKE YOU ANGRY
I APOLOGIZE.
I
SINCERELY
APOLOGIZE
WHENEVER YOU THINK I'VE HAD ENOUGH...? JUST CUT ME OFF! ..... REALLY!
EVERY PLACE I'VE STAYED, I'VE HAD A PRE-SET LIMIT. LIT!..
I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY
AND YOU'RE RIGHT. I SHOULD'VE TOLD YOU RIGHT AWAY -- AND I APOLOGIZE FOR NOT TELLING YOU RIGHT AWAY.
I MEAN IT, TOO...THIS IS YOUR TAVERN. ALL YOU HAVE TO SAY IS, "RICK? THAT'S IT. NO MORE STOUT."
AND BOOM. I'LL STOP.
SNAP
JUST LIKE THAT.
HEY! WITHIN LIMITS PAL.
HA HA HA HA
YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO DENY A GROWING BOY HIS BREAKFAST JUICE -- WOULD'JA?

MWAHAHAHA
HA
BREAKFAST JUICE?!?
YOU BET!
HALF STOUT
HALF BAR LIME
THIS BABY'S JUST LOADED WITH MANY IMPORTANT VITAMINS AND "GOOD MORNING FRESHNESS"
TINK. TINK.
SIP.
IT TASTES A LOT BETTER THAN IT SOUNDS.
NO BIG SURPRISE THERE
SINCE IT SOUNDS LIKE DOG SHIT
HAHAHAH

THE LAST PLACE I WAS IN ALLOWED ME TWO BREAKFAST JUICES EVERY MORNING...
AND THE PLACE BEFORE THAT LET ME HAVE THREE
BEING REALLY, REALLY HONEST WITH MYSELF
I'D SAY THREE -- I MEAN TWO IS A BETTER IDEA THAN THREE
SO!
TWO BREAKFAST JUICES... EVERY MORNING
DEAL?
DEAL.
GREAT. UH--
I SHOULD PROBABLY MENTION THAT THIS IS MY THIRD ONE
SO WE'LL START THE DEAL FIRST THING TOMORROW
YOU KNOW... I ALMOST NEVER READ MY WORK OUT LOUD?
STRANGE.
SO!
THIS IS THE NEXT MORNING IN HER KITCHEN.
She turned to you
1) Five years ago
2) Three years ago

"HOW DID MY MARRIAGE break up?" She turned and looked at the carefully tended window box, as if the answer lay buried there beneath her limp begonias. "If you had asked me five years ago..." The sentence fragment transported her back in time, furrowing her alabaster forehead, as well tended as the window box. "If you had asked me three years ago..." Another fragment, this time drawing her closer to the present, closer to confession. "I would've said, 'He became weak, too... pliant. He no longer wanted me for a wife, a lover, or a mate. He wanted me to be his mother.'" She sneered, "He wanted his mo-ommy." Drawing out the word, etching it with acid sweetness caused her to wince — as if it were an attack dog or a hunting falcon which, now denied its former prey, could only turn on its master. "I came to see..." Still another fragment. Clearly, what she had seen she found difficult to express. My senses swam with the effort to remain still, to not clear my throat which had suddenly gone dry. So precariously balanced was her mood that the slightest sound, the least movement would — I was sure — snap it like a twig. The seconds stretched like hours until she spoke again, steeling herself against her own words, which came quietly, as if she were speaking to herself — or in a dream.

"I came to see that it was I...who made him that way." Some internal barricade had been breached. "Oh, it wasn't all my fault. Like so many things, it happened gradually. It was unspoken. He was a gentlem —" The word caught in her throat, and it was she who coughed — releasing me, gratefully, to follow suit. "A gentleman. A gentle man, who could no more dream of forcing himself on me..." This sentence, too, remained a fragment. Her features revealed her inner torment. Unable to bear the emotional cost of either retreating from or advancing upon her own subject, after some moments she chose the latter. "I used our love-making to reward him and punish him. Knowing he would never force himself on me. I used my body to modify his behaviour — the way a mother would use a child's privileges for the same purpose. Taking away the privileges to punish, restoring them as a reward."

I thought of my own marriage and winced, inwardly, at the memory.

"Love-making has to be *love*-making," she said. "It has to exist between two people as a...pure expression of what they have together. It can't be allowed to get mixed up with the mundane day-to-day things: the petty disagreements, the silly arguments. If you wield it like a club or...trade it for something else... the relationship is already over. After that you're just going through the motions."

She stood up and came over to where I was sitting.

"That's why we can't see each other anymore," she said, caressing my cheek. "I've started doing that to you, Ricky."

I thought about her coolness towards me two nights before, when I had arrived late for our supper.

"I know this is painful for you. It's just as painful for me. Perhaps it's more painful for me. But I know it's better that we end it right now. Better that we end it while what is between us is still pure, still honest, still undamaged. I love you with all my heart, but I've discovered that recognizing my own mistakes isn't enough, sometimes, to make me change. But I want you to remember what we talked about this morning, Ricky. Don't ever stay with a woman who rewards and punishes you with her body."

I never loved her more than I did at that moment — as I stood up to leave her forever.

Wow. (impressed — and then further impressed by the degree to which he is impressed:) *Wow. She — she must be a great woman.*

(perplexed) ***Who?***

(equally perplexed) *Andrea.*

(thinks, and then laughs uproariously) ***AN-drea? Are you kidding? Andrea was a doorknob.*** **(laughs again)** ***As a matter of fact, I've*** **known** ***doorknobs that were more intelligent.***

(angry, bristling) *How can you say that, after she told you...*

(chiding) ***Oh, come on. Andrea didn't say any of that.*** **(sees that Cerebus is not mollified)** ***No, no. See, Andrea — or the woman she's based on — believes to this day that her husband became weak, turned into a little boy because*** **(considering it for the first time) (laughing)** ***...because of some natural phenomenon — like too much rainfall or a freak lightning storm. You know what I mean?*** **(sees that Cerebus** ***doesn't*** **know what he means)** ***Andrea thought it just... happened. It was Viktor who told me the thing about wives using their bodies to reward and punish their little-boy husbands. So, whenever the woman Andrea is based on would start criticizing her ex-husband, it would make me think of what Viktor said.***

Oh. (getting over his disappointment) *So why didn't you have a character based on* Viktor *say it?*

(appalled) ***Oh, I could never do that. Have a*** **man** ***say those things?*** **(picturing it)** ***No. Uh-uh. That would be misogynistic — woman-hating. Even if I*** **could** ***get it published — which I*** **couldn't,** ***but even if I*** **could —** ***no one would read it.*** **(explaining the facts of life)** ***That*** **passage** ***was*** **one** ***of the things that*** **got** ***me the license to*** **write Rick's Story. (invoking the irrefutable)** ***The Literature Warden*** **told** ***me Andrea was one of the best women characters she had ever*** **read.**

But...(dislocated)*...the woman Andrea is based on didn't* say *any of those things, so it's a* lie!

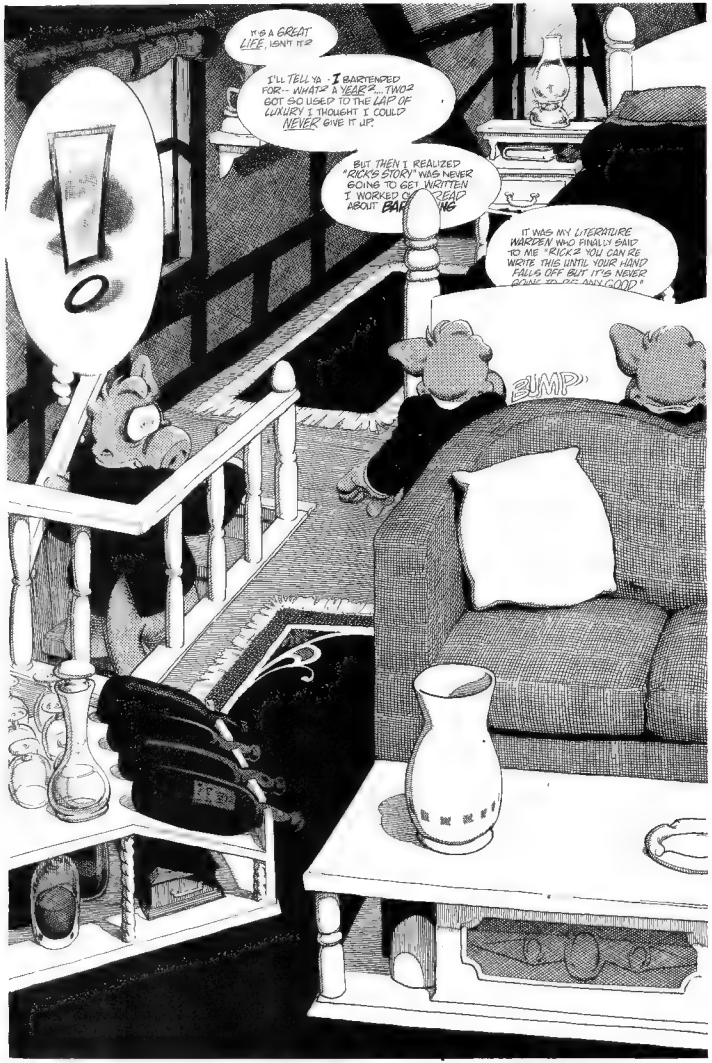
(saintly, smiling) ***You really*** **are** ***a devil.*** **(they lock eyes until Cerebus looks away)** ***It's*** **not** ***a lie. It's the*** **truth.** ***Beautiful women*** **are** ***true... Remember? I told you that last night.*** **(patiently, instructing a small child) (framing a rule between his hands:)** ***A woman character makes a*** **true** ***thing*** **truer (moving his hands apart to frame a larger rule)** ***A*** **beautiful** ***woman character makes a*** **true** ***thing*** **Absolutely** ***True.***

(irritated) *You said you didn't remember anything after you showed Cerebus what "drinking fast" was.*

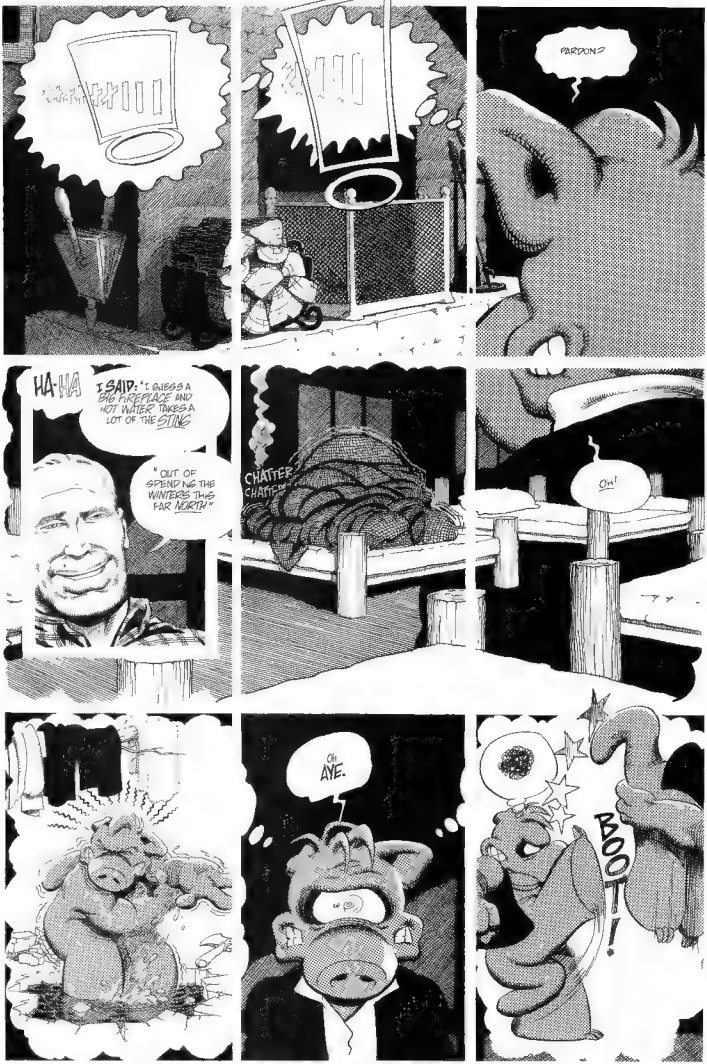
(without missing a beat) ***I remember bits and pieces. I remember telling you about beautiful women.*** **(saintly and smiling: nice try, devil, the smile says) (out of the blue)** ***I want to see where you*** **sleep.** ***The big building next door, right?***

KLIK
KLAK
KLAK
HAHAHAHAHAHA
HAHAHA
THE PAPAL BED!
HAHAHA
HAHAHA

STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
SLAM.
WOW!


IT'S A GREAT LIFE, ISN'T IT?
I'LL TELL YA - I BARTENDED FOR -- WHAT? A YEAR? ...TWO? GOT SO USED TO THE LAP OF LUXURY I THOUGHT I COULD NEVER GIVE IT UP.
BUT THEN I REALIZED "RICK'S STORY" WAS NEVER GOING TO GET WRITTEN I WORKED ON DEAD ABOUT BARTENDING
IT WAS MY LITERATURE WARDEN WHO FINALLY SAID TO ME "RICK? YOU CAN RE WRITE THIS UNTIL YOUR HAND FALLS OFF BUT IT'S NEVER GOING TO BE ANY GOOD."
!
BUMP

I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW ADMIRABLE - I THINK IT IS -
THAT YOU SLEEP DOWN HERE
OH! UH
?
THANKS
SO, I FINALLY SAY WHAT'S BEHIND THIS DRAPE HERE?
UH...
WHOA!
YOU HAVE YOUR OWN HOT WATER HEATER?!
OH.
UH
AYE.


PARDON?
HA-HA
I SAID: "I GUESS A BIG FIREPLACE AND "HOT WATER" TAKES A LOT OF THE STING
" OUT OF SPEND NG THE WINTERS THIS FAR NORTH"
CHATTER CHATTER
OH!
OH AYE.
BOO!

SO!
TUMP
CLOMP
WADDAYA DO FOR FUN AROUND HERE?
TUMP
CLOMP
FUN? HA
CEREBUS STANDS AROUND ALL DAY.
TUMP
CLOMP
CLOMP
CEREBUS STANDS AROUND EVERY
TUMP
COMP
WAP
HEY!
TUMP!
TUMP!
TUMP!
COME ON!
TUMP!
TUMP
TUMP

OUT HERE
TAK TAK TAK
YOU'RE CRAZY.
YOU CAN'T EVEN SEE THE NET FROM OUT THERE
I CAN SEE THE NET JUST FINE FROM OUT HERE
OF COURSE, IF YOUR EYESIGHT ISN'T WHAT IT
ONE! TWO! THREE! FOUR!
FIVE! SIX! SEVEN! EIGHT!
NINE. PACES!
THINK THINK THINK
YOU'RE SERIOUS
AYE: NINE. PACES
HOW--UM, HOW HARD CAN I HIT IT?
CEREBUS HAS NO IDEA
HOW HARD CAN YOU HIT IT?
SQUEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
HAHAHA
NOPE! I MEAN
HOW HARD AM I ALLOWED TO HIT IT?
TUNG TUNG
...YOU'RE ...ALLOWED.. TO HIT IT...
AS HARD AS YOU..CAN HIT IT
YOU'RE SERIOUS
TUNG
YOU WANNA JUST PLAY HOPSCOTCH INSTEAD?
CEREBUS HAS PLENTY OF CHALK
JUST.. MAKING SURE
I MEAN I COULD TAKE YOUR HEAD OFF FROM THIS CLOSE
AYE.. AND THEN CEREBUS GETS A CHANCE TO TAKE YOUR HEAD OFF
THAT'S WHY IT'S CALLED A "GAME"

AYE.
CEREBUS IS READY.
CEREBUS WAS READY THE FIRST TIME YOU ASKED
CEREBUS WAS READY THE SECOND TIME YOU ASKED
AND CEREBUS IS STILL READY
JUST MAKING
SURE!
TUNG
TUNG
WAP
BIP
BIP
HAHA
HAHA
HAHA

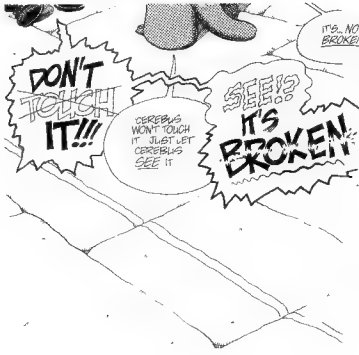
SMEK
OH FER THREE
TUNG
OH FER FOUR
TUNG WAP
OH FER FIVE
BIP BIP
CEREBUS TURN
PHEW
TOUGH GAME!!
WELL YOU PLAY IT SURE IS
HEH THANKS
AW YER WELCOME
TUNG
TOONG
BAP
BIP BIP
GOSH THAT WAS LOADS OF FUN
BUT CEREBUS SHOULD GET BACK TO HIS BARTENDING

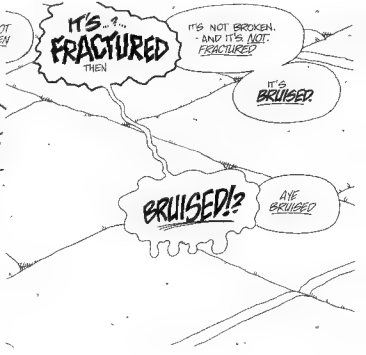
SO YOU FORFEIT THE GAME?
ERT
FORFEIT?
CEREBUS WON.
WON?! HAHA HAHA
YOU ONLY TOOK ONE SHOT.
AYE... CEREBUS ONLY NEEDED ONE SHOT
YOU WENT OH-FER-FIVE
CEREBUS SCORED..
SO CEREBUS WON.
AH!
BUT IT'S NOT A COMPLETE GAME UNTIL WE BOTH TAKE FIVE SHOTS
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
EVEN IF CEREBUS MISSES ALL FOUR!
O-KAY
CEREBUS WILL TAKE HIS LAST FOUR SHOTS
WOULD YOU PLEASE THROW THE BALL TO CEREBUS?
THANK YOU
TLING
TLING
TLING
TLING
SWISH
SWISH

TUNG
WAK
NICE BRUD
ONE FER

YOU YOU BROKE MY ARM!

OH FOR THE LOVE OF IT
CEREBUS DID NOT BREAK YOUR ARM.
YES YOU DID
IT'S SWELLING UP
AN' AN'
IT'S ALL RED!
LET CEREBUS SEE IT


DON'T TOUCH IT!!!
CEREBUS WON'T TOUCH IT. JUST LET CEREBUS SEE IT
SEE!? IT'S BROKEN
IT'S... NOT BROKEN


IT'S... FRACTURED
THEN
IT'S NOT BROKEN. AND IT'S NOT FRACTURED
IT'S BRUISED.
BRUISED!?
AYE BRUISED

OW
OWWW
WELL... WE'LL HAVE TO POSTPONE THE GAME
THE GAME'S OVER?
OW
CAN WE TALK ABOUT THIS INSIDE?
I NEED TO MAKE A SLING FOR MY ARM
CEREBUS TOOK ANOTHER SHOT BECAUSE YOU SAID LISTEN
OW!
YOU DON'T NEED A SLING. IT. ISN'T. BROKEN.
I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT OW! I THINK I'M FRACTURED
IT. ISN'T. BROKEN.
AND IT. ISN'T.

AARDVARK COMMENT

Dear Dave and Ger,

I have been pondering the world outside the tavern of late and was reminded of something I read once. Can't remember where, or the exact words, but it was something along the lines of: "It's the Mama's boys who always make the biggest splash."

It seemed a little silly at the time, but like I say I've been thinking about it. If you define a "Mama's Boy" as a man whose early life was dominated either by his mother or some other female relative (grandmother, aunt, sister, whatever), then you can create quite an interesting little list. I would point out that as I am an entertainment bio junkie, this list is a little biased that way, but I suspect that there would be others. Of course, there would also be plenty who wouldn't qualify, but it is interesting how many originals and pacesetters there are here.

In no particular order, then, and with no in-depth research: Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Elton John, William Randolph Hearst, Henry Ford, Walt Disney, Bill Clinton, Jack Nicholson, Charlie Chaplin, Eric Clapton, David Niven, Robert Mitchum, Douglas Fairbanks Sr., Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Lou Gehrig, and Jackie Robinson.

And some *Cerebus* favourites: The Marx Brothers, all the Beatles except Paul, Oscar Wilde, and Keith Richards.

Makes you wonder what a generation of Cirinist-era children would be like.

David Groenewegen
14 Dunloe Ave.
Box Hill North VIC 3129
Australia

I've been writing a nice long answer to this one in my head since it came in back in February. If I get — let's say — three letters amplifying or refuting or fabricating David's points, I'll have a go at it. Make that four letters.

❀❀❀❀❀❀❀❀❀❀❀

Dear Dave and Ger,

This is the first time I've ever written any comic. I just wanted to get that straight right off, so if it sucks you'll know why. Now, there are probably thousands of people writing their first letter to a comic every day (not all to Aardvark Comment, of course), *but* what is kind of strange for me is that I've been reading comics for over a dozen years and I've never written before. Sure, there have been other times when I've thought about writing but for one reason or another never did. Well, whatever.

Naturally, after so many years of reading, I have a lot of points I'd *like* to say, but don't worry, I won't make this letter *that* long. Before I get into my main reason for writing, I do have to say thanks for making such an excellent comic. To make something entertaining *and* thought-provoking (no matter which medium) is a rarer talent than you might think. Sad, but true. What really gave me the urge to write is your recent series on "Comics and the Mass Medium." The Television. And it should be given a proper-noun standing. It is an awesome force. And it is being run by…well, whatever it is, it ain't good. No news to anyone really. "What's your point here, man?"

Well, my point is Television: what It's doing, and what you're doing. You mentioned that Television is not only the great addiction of Everybody, but also that it is the great conqueror of Everything. As I see it, this is pretty much true. However, historically, conquerors have had a difficult time restructuring a society that they have conquered to the extent that Television has. For example, after Alexander conquered Egypt, it remained Egypt, and the Regent (Ptolemy I) became pharaoh. New ruler, no big deal, no real concrete structural changes. The Communists took over Russia — the state says no religion — there are still millions of practising Jews and Christians in Russia — even after Stalin's purges. And Stalin wasn't actually all that much different than the Czar, in actual practice anyway. What I'm saying is, people readily accept a new ruler, as long as the status quo stays pretty much the same or — at the least — changes at the same pace it always did. While most new rulers would be happy with this situation, not so was Television. After firmly establishing its dominance in the hearts and minds of the people (I would say it became truly confident in the 1990s, but it may have been earlier), Television set its sights on changing the people faster than they had ever been changed before. This brings me to what I have long called "Family Ties syndrome."

At first, *Family Ties* was this nice shitcom, with the nice Thursday night time slot. Everybody watches it, everybody chuckles when the live studio audience chuckles. Psychologists inform us that during the show our brains were in the alpha state, something similar to hypnosis. Now, Television can make us "grow" and become "better" people. Especially men, because men needed the most "improvement." And to show us the way was Alex. Now there's Alex, a preppy young lad, all the girls like him. He's focused, he has drive, dreams, ambition. He thinks like a guy. Now, every week Alex is put in some situation where his traditional male thinking would put him in a dilemma. For instance, he *can* go to the dance with the pretty airhead, but if he does, the girl with bad hair, no fashion sense, and that external braces contraption on her head who has been helping him with his homework will be crushed. A common situation for most television characters. At the end, Alex does "the right thing" and the girl has this amazing makeover into Cinderella. An important lesson for all those impressionable young minds out there, hoping to get the girls to like them as much as they do Alex. So Television also usurped the role of moral development. You might say that it was given the role freely by parents, but only after it deceived them into thinking it was harmless.

This development continued into what is known today as "Political Correctness," whereby anything considered offensive by anyone shall be considered illegal, immoral, or in some other sense wrong. Political Correctness reeks of Newspeak. Both in its changing of the language and in the way that everyone *feels* it is a good thing to change the language this way. CBC a.k.a. Ministry of Truth? Whoa, I'm starting to get a little out there now. Well, whatever.

On this PC language thing, I was hoping you could get one of your UK readers to either confirm or correct a rumour I heard that professors or teachers in the UK may be fired for failing to speak in neuter.

So where can developing minds find guidance that is not sending them to shuffle off in blind obedience to the pattern of cathode ray? Right there in your pages, Dave. I've talked to some of those guys at parties — guys who have never seen anything but what the TV offers. Poor wretches, riddled with guilt for being born the "wrong" gender and feminized enough to believe that they are inferior (forget equality) to women. Afraid to laugh at blond jokes in public. They generally end up arguing on sentiment instead of logic. Well, thanks, Dave. That might have been me.

Keith Ziegler
Calgary, Alberta

P.S. - Did you know after four years in university, you are *really* encouraged to take senior-level courses? It's true.

Tangentially to your point (the cliché television plot that you mentioned), I remember jotting down a little note to myself as I was mulling over what you wrote: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a poor man to enter Marilyn Monroe or Jackie Onassis." You can't get much more tangential than that.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Dear Dave,

I suppose I'm what you might call a *Cerebus* neophyte. I only began picking the book up with the onset of "Guys," and I have to admit candidly that I might not have done so even then if it hadn't happened to begin on a week just when I was looking for something new to try. Still, I picked it up, since I'd been curious about *Cerebus* for a while and had never gotten around to trying it.

My first impression was that this was a pretty good book. Crisp, clean art, with wonderfully detailed backgrounds, and fine lettering. Intriguing characters, some of whom looked suspiciously familiar. But I realized after only a couple of months of reading "Guys" that I was going to need some background information to better understand what was going on here. So, I asked my local comics shop owner to order me the "phone books" one at a time, one every week, until I was caught up with the story. (Thanks for keeping them in print and available, by the way — I'd never have been able to catch up otherwise!) As I read each one, I found that *Cerebus* was swiftly rising towards the top of my personal favorite stories. Each new "phone book" was quickly read and reread to tatters, and now they occupy a special place in my collection. I was struck more than once by the urge to write in, but actively restrained myself since I realized that many of the questions I had might be answered as the story unfolded. As I write this, I've just finished reading "Minds" and many of the queries have, indeed, been answered. I do still have more questions, but I'll sit tight and hope that they, too, will be answered as the continuing story flows onward.

It's odd, really, reading and trying to absorb sixteen-plus years of a comics story of this scope in something less than two months. In that time, I read stories which made me laugh, stories which made my pulse race with excitement, stories which moved me to near tears, and not a few stories which irritated me or moved me to almost pure rage. From the constant pokes at the comics industry (has your con-going really been as hellish as the "Petuniacon" issues would seem to suggest?) and the styles and characters contained within, to the cynical, dark-souled, and misogynistic beliefs that permeated many issues of the book, there was a lot in the first 200 issues that almost seemed designed to irritate, provoke, or otherwise alienate the casual reader. The opinions and rationalizations presented in many of your "Notes from the President" (had the good fortune to discover several of these archived on a World Wide Web site) gave me a better look at your creative mind, at the driving force behind *Cerebus*, and so gradually I gained at least a partial understanding of the oft-maligned and frequently controversial Dave Sim.

Dave, I won't pretend I agree with all the beliefs and opinions seen in the pages of *Cerebus*. As a matter of fact, there are more than a few things about your personality (again, as revealed in the *Cerebus* story line, "Notes from the President," and various interviews) that I don't care for. I can understand your castigation of readers who brace you with questions you've heard a thousand times over, but consider this: Many fans (like myself) may be asking questions like "Did you always know the entire 300-issue story line from the very beginning?" because we're truly intrigued by this complex piece of work and want to know more. I can also understand your refusal to be drawn into arguments about feminism, politics, religion, drug use, or the inherent evils of large comics companies; in fact, one of the things I really respect about you is the way you've shown time and time again that the opinions you've stated are backed by solid personal beliefs formed by an intelligent, incisive mind. But this same mind sometimes seems unusually quick to discount or ignore the possible validity of other viewpoints, simply because they're different from your own. That upsets me personally because I don't like to think that somebody with such obvious intelligence should be so close-minded.

What I think about you isn't the real issue here, however; I could write entire essays on "What I think of Dave Sim the person," and in truth much of it would be complimentary. What I think of *Cerebus*, on the other hand, is a great deal more important, as far as I'm concerned (and, unless I miss my guess, as far as you're concerned

too). *Cerebus* is, in my considered opinion, a triumph. It's a comic I'm still kicking myself for missing all these years. It's a book that went from "almost completely unknown to me" to "personal favorite of mine" in a matter of months. It's a book that is always at or near the forefront of my mind when I talk about excellence in comics. It's a remarkable book not just because of its beautiful artwork and utterly real characters, but also because of its engaging plot and complexly woven story line. *Cerebus* is, in short, one of the reasons that I read comics.

Your distinctive pictures and Gerhard's detailed backgrounds continue to surprise me with their power. Few artists have the ability to breathe such life into scenes as the two of you do. Complex layouts, shaped word balloons, and lettering that changes to fit the dialogue — this is neat stuff. Your characters are so alive; this sounds clichéd but it's true. I care about them; I hurt when they hurt and laugh when they do. And one of the neatest things is seeing the characters that are subtly or blatantly based on other fictional or real-life characters. Rick Veitch, Groucho Marx, Elric, the Roach and his multiple personalities — well, you get the idea. What a cast. I keep wondering who's going to show up next.

As I've said, your writing nearly always awakens a strong emotional response in me. Sometimes, as in "Jaka's Story," it's primarily sadness. Sometimes, as in most of "Church and State," it's amazement and shock. Sometimes, as in "High Society" (which is, by the way, my favorite of the stories I've seen in *Cerebus* — I love the Regency Elf), it's amusement and wonder at the intricacy of the story. Other times, it's a soundless whistle, as with most of "Mothers and Daughters" (I found myself wincing as I imagined the backlash from offended or angry readers that must have resulted from much of the story line). But, nearly always, it's satisfaction, deep and primal, the feeling that Here is Something Great. *Cerebus* — controversy, parody, misogyny, obnoxiousness, violence, crudity, and all — is a book I'd not change so much as a whit. Whether I like you as a person is immaterial — it's the book that matters, and the quality of work displayed in this book has pretty much assured that I'll be here through the rest of "Guys" and onward until March 2004.

Thanks for the great stories, Dave. Best wishes to you and Gerhard, and here's hoping 1997 will be a great year for both of you two, and *Cerebus* as well.

Phil Carter
200 Piccadilly Sq., Apt. A-6
Athens, GA 30605

Ain't it awful that I'm actually vain enough to print *a letter like this? Thanks, Phil. Ger and I hope you have a great 1997 as well.*

❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋

Dear Dave,

Two brief disagreements with views expressed in, respectively, *Cerebus* 214 and 216:

(1) Much as I like your reference to TV images as "pixies" (born as they are from "pixels," of course), I'm afraid this is one area where size definitely does not count; otherwise, the images of comics would be as "pixie-ish" as those of TV, and both would be consigned to a perpetual case of "image-envy" beside their gigantic cinema brethren. In my mind, at least, it does not matter to me how large the image was when I saw it on movie screen, TV screen or comics page, because I can blow it up to any size I like mentally, and I assume that others can probably do the same. With TV the real issue is not size but scope: as a medium, its moments of brilliance are frequently overshadowed by what former NBC president Paul Klein called the "LOP theory," which had it that TV should be dominated by the "Least Objectionable Programming." To an extent comics and films have at times been influenced by this sort of know-nothing philosophical stance, but they've usually broken free of it either because (a) with movies, there's so *much* money to be made from breaking taboos, or (b) with comics, there's less money but fewer people riding herd over what comes out.

(2) Stephen Holland may not want to "waste time arguing about words," but as much as I agree with him that "independents" need to change their hat-in-hand stance, labelling such work "the real mainstream" is not going to convince anyone. First off, I get the impression Holland thinks comic-book publishers derived the term from the "mainstream" of book publishing, which Holland finds rife with "fiction," "autobiography," "humour," "non-fiction," and some sort of strange creation called "adult fantasy" (which is so vague it could connote anything from Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings* to Anne Rice's sadomasochistic "Beauty" trilogy). I don't think that's the case. I believe comic-book publishers were looking less at the world of books than at the world of film, where the concept of the "mainstream" is nowhere near as elastic as it is (or, at least, as Holland perceives it to be) in books. I goggle to read that "there's hardly a blockbuster one could refer to as superheroes, they're adult fantasy," and I am forced to conclude that for him, as for many others, it's not a superhero if it doesn't wear a weird and impractical costume. For me, at least, a superhero is a hero who is something beyond the normal type of hero, a purveyor of what James Twitchell nicely terms "preposterous violence." Pauline Kael says presciently (if superficially) that the success of *Star Wars* would make films into what she was pleased to call "comic books": by this I think she was identifying a host of noncostumed-but-still-preposterous heroes who proceeded to flood '80s cinema: Rambo, Indiana Jones, Conan, Mad Max, and the various adaptations of heroes from the comics themselves. "Adult fantasy — *Preacher*-style at least?" I don't think so. The comic-book megacorps are in the same business as the film megacorps: appealing to the love of spectacular heroes. The main differences today are just that (a) as mentioned above, films make a hellaciously greater wad of dough, and (b) they can vary the genres they do somewhat more, though films of preposterous action are still the real "blockbusters," partly because they translate so easily in non-English-speaking

countries. If Holland wants comics to emulate books more than films, more power to his vision, but let's make the vision a little closer to a reality we can all agree on.

Gene Phillips
2750 Holly Hall, #1105
Houston, TX 77054

1) I still think that there are implications to the size reduction in putting a movie on television, but I take your point about scope being a more significant concern in weighing the relative merits of television and comic books.
2) "Preposterous violence," "non-costumed-but-still-preposterous heroes": I'd have to say that my own perceptions are closer to your own than to Stephen's. This ties in with an enormous can of worms I've been opening mentally for the last year or so. Can I get another four letters or so theorising about what links Rambo, Indiana Jones, Conan, and Mad Max thematically? Personal opinion, but I don't think comic books are "going anywhere" until we turn the rock over and see what's squirming around under there.

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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Robert Andrew Bottoms, and I am currently a Freshman attending East Carolina University. My major is English with a concentration in Writing, and I intend, if nothing else, to obtain my BA and pursue a career in journalism. My hobbies include writing, playing baseball, and reading. The latter is the reason why I am writing this letter to you, the companies. I enjoy reading, but the majority of the reading in my life has come from numerous stacks of dusty, wrinkled comic books which are now "resting in peace" on my bookshelves and in the corners of my room. Comics have always kept me amused, and in a way they are almost like a drug. If I missed an issue, I would go crazy trying to find out what happened and who did what. It was until three years ago that I found my love for comics could actually do some good.

As I sat in front of my computer screen, bored beyond comprehension on a humdrum summer afternoon, I suddenly remembered what my friends and I had discussed while riding the bus back in the seventh grade.

"It would be so cool to make up your own characters and have them published in real comics!"

I immediately began to come up with numerous names and powers for characters that were seemingly entering my mind a mile a minute. At first, it was fun and it kept the day going by without much delay. Then, I started to feel that I was getting nowhere with this, and so I just kept going and going. Two years later, I had a total of three hundred and sixty characters, which included teams, organizations, etc.... Saving to a disk from my hard drive, I then printed them out at school and sent them to the federal government to be copyrighted. Four and a half months later, they came back copyrighted and ready to go. I then searched the Internet for the addresses of comic-book companies that I felt would be interested in my work. This letter is an informal/business-type letter which tells you the reason why I have occupied so much of your time.

I am offering the opportunity to purchase any of the three hundred and sixty characters of your choice. I am deeply grateful to you because you have taken the time and effort to read this letter. This, I feel, is the opportunity of a lifetime for me, and by reading this letter you have done something which keeps it going. I would be honored if you would kindly mail me back with your response as soon as possible. I know that you have a busy schedule and, once again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Robert Andrew Bottoms
East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858

Just thought I'd share this one with you nice folks.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Dear Mr. Sim,

Thank you for - "(and maybe the mustache is just glued on)."

It's been quite a while since I've had such a laugh.

Brian A. Lipske

Thank you for writing in and telling me.

continued

FROM COVER

examining and searching people's minds, to find out who is really wise among them, and who only thinks that he is. What would one not give, gentlemen, to be able to question the leader of that great host against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or the thousands of other men and women whom one could mention, to talk and mix and argue with whom would be unimaginable happiness? At any rate I presume that they do not put one to death there for such conduct; because apart from the other happiness in which their world surpasses ours, they are now immortal for the rest of time, if what we are told is true.

You too, gentlemen of the jury, must look forward to death with confidence, and fix your minds on this one belief, which is certain: that nothing can harm a good

man either in life or after death, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods.This present experience of mine has not come about mechanically; I am quite clear that the time had come when it was better for me to die and be released from my distractions. That is why my sign never turned me back. For my own part I bear no grudge at all against those who condemned me and accused me, although it was not with this kind intention that they did so, but because they thought they were hurting me; and that is culpable of them. However, I ask them to grant me one favour. When my sons grow up, gentlemen, if you think that they are putting money or anything else before goodness, take your revenge by plaguing them as I plagued you; and if they fancy themselves for no reason, you must scold them just as I scolded you, for neglecting the important things and thinking that they are good for something when they are good for nothing. If you do this, I shall have had justice at your hands, both I myself and my children.

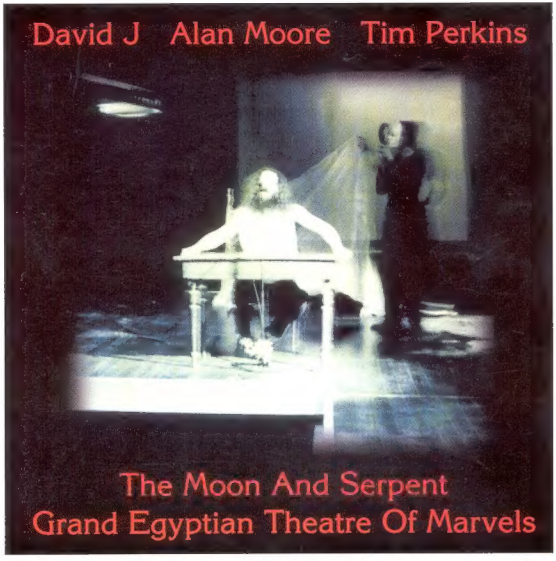
Now it is time that we were going, I to die and you to live; but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God.

Last issue's excerpt: John F. Kennedy
Profiles in Courage

BOB the ANGRY FLOWER
DENUDED
YAWN...
CLIK
BUH.
MY PETALS! GONE! I AM CURSED! IT'S ALL JUST AS WAS PROPHESIED...
I LOVE FORTUNE COOKIES!
Crack!
All your petals are going to fall out.
ALL RIGHT, THERE'S NO POINT IN EMPTY RECRIMINATION. I HAVE TO FIND A SOLUTION!
HEY GUYS, WHAT'S NEW? NOTHING? GREAT! WHO WANTS BREAKFAST?
WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR HEAD, MAN?
BOB the angry flower
IT'S OVER
HMM. WHAT'S THIS?
Bob:
There's no easy way to say this so I'll just say it: Jake's moving in with me. Don't be hard. You're a cool special guy and you'll find someone in no time.
Karol
THAT FUCKING BITCH!
BURN BURN BURN
OH, I'M NOT DONE WITH YOU YET! WHERE'S THE GODDAMN FUSION REACTOR???
HOW? HOW COULD SHE? WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME ???
DO YOU EVEN KNOW ANYONE NAMED KAROL?
MAYBE...

Get the complete "Bob the Angry Flower" collection: *Bob the Angry Flower: In Defence of Facism* (love that title) from Stephen Notley's Leftover Books, #1 10726 84 Ave., Edmonton, Alberta Canada T6E 2H9. $10.00 (I hope — there's no price on it). web-site *snotley @compusmart.ab.ca.* It's my favouite comic strip.

PLUGOLA



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